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Chapter VI. Customs and Practices

1. Birth

852 Twelve days after the birth of a Miao child, his family always holds a "twelfth-day" celebration for him; after a month there is a "first-month" celebration. The family kills chickens and cook meat. They ask a Taoist priest to come to pray for him and name him. 551 The child is usually named "Ya Ta" /Ya the Elder/ or "Ya Erh" /Ya the Second/, etc. There is also a celebration of his first birthday, but the way it is celebrated is unknown to me.

2. Marriage

582 The Miao are generally betrothed when they are about twenty years old. 584 Betrothals are either made through the decision of the parents and the advice of go-betweens, or they are made after a couple have fallen in love and ask the parents for permission and the consultation of a go-between. In the latter case, the parents always respect their children's wishes. According to Miao custom, however, before the formal betrothal, the hour, day, month, and year of birth of the young couple (these are entered in the family registers) must be "compared" by someone who is able to read the almanac well [622 787] (generally a chia-ch'ang). If their horoscopes are in harmony with each other and are not contradictory to those of the parents of both families, they are formally betrothed; otherwise, they must give each other up. Therefore, even if a couple are deeply in love and the match is approved of by the parents, if, unfortunately, their horoscopes are not "harmonious," they cannot marry. Many tragedies of lovers have resulted therefrom. 583 [131] Betrothal presents consist of about 20 dollars (previously 10 dollars or less), three jars of wine, three pecks of rice, and 30 catties of pork. There are two types of marriage: one is the ch'ü-hsi, in which the betrothal presents are given by the bridegroom's /47/ family; the other is the chao-chui 583 591 608 /literally, "to call a son-in-law," a marriage in which the son-in-law comes to live in the wife's family/ in which the betrothal presents are given by the bride's family.

2:Ling & Ruey--128 E-5 (1933) 1947 AE5 Miao AE5

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FAMILY AND MARRIAGE AND FUNERAL CUSTOMS

(1) The Family

594 The basic social organization /sic/ of the Miao is the family, and moreover their family structure is the small family system, which consists of husband, wife, and children under age. This kind of small family system is the original system of the Miao. The Miao Fang Pei Lan, in the chapter on [591] villages, says: "Among the Miao people father and sons and brothers do not live together in one house. When a son grows up he lives apart, erecting a new house and then there is another household." Because of the small family system their [573] living quarters as a rule consist of two or three rooms. In the house there is only one bed, and the husband, wife, and children all sleep on it together. When a girl grows up, a separate bed may be set up for her. As a rule the Miao practice [595] monogamy. Sometimes they take a concubine, to live together with the wife, or to live separately. In the family [462] economy, men and women share agricultural work, but household chores are mainly the women's responsibility. Family [423] property consists of fields, houses, animals, and furniture, [422] tools, and utensils. When the children grow up, a boy gets married at 17 or 18, and is given a certain amount of property [582] in order to build a separate house and establish a family. A girl marries at fifteen or sixteen. So, the small family system among the Miao can always be maintained, and is not likely to be expanded.

614 Because of strict adherence to the small family system, clan organization cannot develop. Among the pure Miao there 551 are the following five surnames: Wu, Lung, Liao, Shih, and Ma. Such surnames as Yang, Shih, P'eng, Chang, and Hung were those of outsiders who married into Miao families and

3: Moninger E-5 (no date) 1921 AE5 Miao AE5

582 585 [591] The young people are married at seventeen or eighteen, and it seems to make no difference whether the young couple live with the groom's parents, the bride's parents, or set up housekeeping in their own home. The wedding is usually held at the groom's home, two or three young girls and a young man or two from his village going for the bride and escorting her back. The bride wears no distinctive dress except a peculiar headdress under her kerchief, and an embroidered girdle of undyed cloth. She also carries two small towels of this same material thrown over her shoulders, and one to cover her face. According to their custom, the bride and groom sit on the same bench and eat and drink together, and then declare their allegiance to the family by serving tea to the parents or in some other simple way.

771 [797] The Miao in their heathen state apparently worshipped any and all gods in an effort to appease them but with little definite idea or set ritual. Idols do not seem to be in evidence in their houses, and being a roving people, they have no temples. They have within the last few years become interested in the Gospel and whole villages have become Christian, much as has been the case in the mass movement, so-called, in India. They are a simple people, highly emotional and temperamentally religious, which is often true of hill peoples. Thus certain emotional phases of religion immediately become paramount in their eyes, and without careful teaching they are liable to be led astray on these points.

797 [2,2] The Miao have no written language of their own, but pick up Chinese character with amazing rapidity. The Christian villages each put up a chapel at their own expense, meet every morning for prayer before they go to their work, and every evening for a short service and an hour or so of study. When a Chinese evangelist or a missionary comes to the village, they study until midnight, when they are sent home in self-defence by the teachers—and at 2 a.m. they are up pounding rice, so that we wonder when they sleep. They are a wonderfully interesting people, these "Children of the Forest," as they style themselves, and it is a rare privilege to be among them and come to know them.

4:Mickey E-5 (1940-?) 1947 AE5 Miao AE5

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Childbirth. After a girl was married she returned to her parents' home. There she stayed, except for short periods in her husband's home during the busy seasons and at feasts, until she was pregnant. Before the child was born she went to live in his home permanently. Sometimes, but not always, when a woman was in labor a priest was asked to chant and cast lots in her behalf. This he did in a room adjacent to the one in which the mother was confined, or out-of-doors nearby. There were no midwives. The mother was assisted by other women who had borne children, either from her husband's or a related household.

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The next morning after a child was born the mother might appear with the baby on her back, even in the kitchen where food was being prepared. There was no idea of impurity and she was not required to keep closely at home for a month or forty days, as in the case of Chinese in the vicinity and among some other groups of Miao.[1] She might rest for three or four days, during which other women came to see the baby, but after that she worked as before at even the hardest of labor, with the baby on her back. I am not sure whether she was expected to refrain from certain foods, or not. I offered one mother an orange which she said she could not eat. She gave it to an older son.

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Announcement Gifts. After the second grandson was born in the family where I was living, the father prepared gifts to send to the village from which his father had migrated, to the household in which an uncle still lived. First in the procession came two men playing the small trumpet. One of them led a black goat. This was a play on words, as the name of a goat (*yang*) has the same sound as the family name (*Yang*) and a word meaning "increase, growth." Then came two men bearing two poles, to which was fastened a whole dead pig, beautifully cleaned and white. After them came two men bearing a similar frame but empty. Last came a man bearing two baskets on a carrying pole. One of the baskets contained red candles and the other a

[1] See Chapple and Coon, 1942, p. 706.

4:Mickey E-5 (1940-?) 1947 AE5 Miao AE5

The bridal party spent that afternoon getting to the groom's village. At the village they played and sang all night. The next day the bride's party was feasted by his relatives. On one occasion I saw, feasting took place about noon. The bride's party sat on two rows of benches facing one another on one of the threshing floors. The food was set in bowls on planks between them by women of a related household. 585

On the third day, after another night of singing and playing the *lu sheng*, the bride and her attendants returned to her village, accompanied by the groom, who brought gifts of meat and rice and spent the night there. When the bride and her attendants left the groom's village to return, the women of the village accompanied them, some stopping at the entrance to the village and some going a little way. At a point where the bride and her attendants were about to disappear from view they stopped and sang a song antiphonally with the other groups. Then they went on and the nearer group rushed after them to watch them out of sight. When they left they were still in ceremonial array, except for plainer blouses. They reached home dead tired and slept from the time of their arrival until the next day.

Tso Chia. After a girl was married she returned at once to her parents' home, where she stayed, except for short periods in her husband's home, during the busy seasons and at feasts, until she was pregnant. Before the child was born she went to live in his home permanently. When the first child was twenty-two days old girls from the mother's village were invited to "drink wine" in honor of the event. They called this "*tso k'ai.*" [2] Some said it was the same as "*tso chia.*" [3] Others said that it was the same as "*ch'ih chiu*" or "*tso chieh*" [4] — a time of rejoicing, calling, of course, for wine in abundance. Among the local Chungchia this was a combination of "*man yüeh*" [5] and the setting up of the permanent household in the groom's home. The bride's village sent with the guests at this feast among the Chungchia a red cupboard and clothing. 591 852 593

[4] This means to drink wine, or to attend a feast.
[5] The first month feast — The feast also given by the Chinese when a baby is a month old.

[9 cont.]

517 purpose of these festivities is to celebrate in advance a rich harvest, and therefore the participants are numerous, especially the young men and women, who go there in new and pretty clothes with the object of finding a mate. As to moon dance, sitting in the moon, singing or chasing the moon, these are occasions specially designed for love-making by the young.

[533] Both men and women are good singers, and they sing to drown out the sorrows in their chest, as well as to effect a lover's union. Anyone who fails to sing at marriage and funeral ceremonies will surely be disgraced. Singing, in short, is a necessary accomplishment. Within a short distance from the village there

[443] is a level ground for the market fair held once in every six days; this is the center of trade for the Miao-I. On such occasions people gather together at the fair, bustling, loitering and looking around, their heart full of joy and fun. It gives them a respite from their routine toil. Aside from this they are fond of music.

[534] Their musical instruments include the liu-sheng, wu-sheng [five tube bamboo wind instrument, flutes, harmonicas, so-na [a clarinet type wind instrument], brass drums, and p'i-pa [lute]. The liu-sheng is the most common instrument; it is made of bamboo with a gradation of notes resembling that of a military band. Its tune is like the plaintive call of a bird but with a variation of notes. The music accompanies simple dance steps, out of which they derive much pleasure and satisfaction.

4. Ceremonies and Customs

584 1) Marriage. The various Miao-I ethnic groups in Kweichow are rather complicated, but their marriage customs, though varying to a certain extent, are generally the same among different tribes. Marriages are either arranged by parents or the parties themselves, but mostly follow the will of the former and take the advice of the go-between. To negotiate marriage [10] they first discuss gifts and dowries. After marriage the bride goes back to her parents

● 591 until she is about to give birth to a son. She is then confined to her husband's house. In ancient times, this custom was first

[10 cont.]

591 practiced by one tribe and then followed by others for so long a time that at last it was firmly established. There are only a few couples who are separated. In such cases, they would participate 587 in moon dance, chasing the moon, yao-ma-lang or kan-piao, and other such agencies of free love to seek their mate for a second marriage.

When a boy reaches the age of fourteen or fifteen the 584 [582] parents usually negotiate marriage for him. First, a friend or a relative is asked to approach a girl's family to propose marriage. When the latter family approves, the go-between would bring the boy and his parents over for an interview. If both sides are satisfied, they then start negotiations of gifts and dowry and make arrangements for the engagement. If one side is not satisfied the matter is dropped. This refers to total strangers: between those who are acquainted with each other such arrangements are unnecessary. In the old days the gift and dowry were 583 given in terms of the number of cows instead of money. Recently, they have been changed to silver pieces, and the larger the amount, the more magnificent it is for the girl's family. If the amount is small then the girl's status is considered low and it becomes a disgrace to the family. When the question of the bride price is settled (with the Hua Miao the highest gift comes to $100 or more) the go-between appoints a date to convey it to the girl's family. Accepting the gift, the family gives a feast, in which friends and relatives are invited to keep the go-between company and to regale him with meat and wine. This is the engagement. Before the wedding day, the gift donation must be fully paid up through the go-between; but if the girl's family is fond of the future son-in-law, half or all the bride price may be 585 waived. On the wedding day the bridegroom's family sends along a man and a woman to welcome the bride, and sometimes the groom goes there himself. (But the groom must provide meat and wine as a welcome home feast.) The bride's parents would ask a few young girls to keep the bride company the night before, and before daybreak the party would commence the wedding march, the bride shaded under a bridal parasol. On arrival at the groom's house, the members of the party have to leap across

[10 cont.]
585 a horse saddle to gain entrance through the gate. After the send-off party leaves, the bride's family immediately slaughters a pig or two, to carry to the groom's house as a send-off gift. That day friends and relatives float in like clouds to offer congratulations. The groom's family puts rice straw on the floor of the cow stall and spreads feasts to entertain the guests. Day or night they would not stop feasting until drunk. That night no one sleeps. The bride does not share the groom's room. The guests from the bride's family and the friends of the groom's family join in a song fest. The following day or the third day the bride returns home with her companions, and the host dispenses cash presents to all the members of the bridal party. The other guests stay on to partake of the farewell feast. After her
● 591 return the bride stays with her parents for a month or fortnight, and has to be welcomed back to her new home by her husband. But the girl's family would keep the son-in-law as a house guest for several days before sending the young couple away. After a short stay the bride goes back again to live with her mother, and only on New Year, at festivals and harvest times, would she accompany her husband home to stay for a few days as a guest of his family. It is only after the children are born that she lives permanently with him. One month after the birth of the first
852 child there would be a feast, and the wife's family [11] would
431 send along some baby clothes and, in case of a wealthy family, also cows and pigs. Those who have received cash gifts from the husband's family at the wedding would now give in return baby's bedding and clothing as well as chicken and duck eggs.
[804] Friends and relatives would each carry with him a sheng [a measure equivalent to 31.6 cubic inches] of rice and a jug of wine to partake in a feast provided by the host, who would slaughter cattle or buy pork and beef from the market for the occasion.

764 2) Funeral. The funeral rituals of the various Miao-I
[755] groups in Kweichow are more or less similar. Due to their belief in spirits, they resort to wizardry for the expulsion of evil spirits in case of sickness, but they would never take any medicine with the result that nine out of ten cases of serious sickness end in death. A man who dies of old age is given funeral rites at

[21 cont.]

585 and drinking, which lasts throughout the night, neither hosts nor guests retiring. That night, the bride and groom do not share the room together. When tired the bride may lie down with the groom's younger sister. The next day the bride and her kinsmen return to her home. After three more days the bride is re-escorted to her husband's family by her brothers and male cousins. After a few days' stay she returns once more to her parents. Thus the wedding ceremony officially terminates. Later, every
•591 time the husband wants his wife back he has to send over two or three sheng of glutinous rice to her family, and she will then come back with an escort of her kinsmen. Each year from the second to the eighth lunar month when farm work in her husband's family requires the help of the wife, she often goes over [22] but only for a few days as a guest without participating in housecleaning and cooking. Not until she becomes pregnant does the wife begin normal living with her husband to assume the responsibilities of the mistress of the household. This custom probably is a vestige of the transition from a maternal to a paternal society. In a maternal society the married woman does not leave her parents after marriage. The fact that the Miao woman does not stay with her husband before his child is born is probably due to this tradition. The paternal society lays much emphasis upon offsprings: only those women capable of procreation are considered good wives. The marriage before
583 conception, from the point of view of having heirs, is only
591 experimental. Therefore the wife cannot enjoy all her rights and privileges, and at the same time she may not assume the responsibilities associated with them. The result is a sort of quasi-marriage, that is, marriage in fact but not in form.

586 There are a small number of pre-arranged marriages
[584] among the Short-skirt Hê Miao, negotiated by parents when the parties concerned are mere children. In such a marriage the bride often refuses to go back to her husband's family soon after returning to her own. This kind of girl is allowed to marry again on the condition that her second husband pays indemnity to the first one for expenses which the latter may incur in another

[166 cont.]

591 The young couple either remains in the paternal home or found a new household, in accordance with their choice.

Other forms of marriage are also practiced by the "Méo."
583 When an official request in marriage has been refused, it is not rare to see the young people pay no attention to the consent of their parents and elope together. When they return they secure their pardon by paying an indemnity to the parents of the young woman.

A poor "Méo" may wed a rich girl. In this case it is the girl's
[556] family that bears all of the expenses of the ceremony, but the married couple enter into a contract to serve this family for a number of years agreed upon.

584 In the region of Pha-Long, the "Méo" observe a rather curious
583 custom and hold a sort of "marriage fair," to which come, in great numbers, young men and young women from several leagues roundabout. This gathering is held on a grassy plateau where boys and girls form in groups about twenty paces apart, turning their backs to each other. These groups sing alternating choruses, very simple ones, in which the young men boast of their skill, their strength, and their wealth and the young women glorify their housekeeping virtues and enumerate the treasures of their trousseaux. Often some sprightly word causes mirth throughout the gathering. The laughter, the songs, and the dances of the men playing the "sen" last throughout the entire afternoon. The sellers of alcohol and cakes do a very good business, while the youths and maidens become better acquainted and establish a basis for future unions.

584 It is during the days which follow this festival that the great majority of the official marriage requests are made. (Photo 154, Plate 40, shows the plateau where this marriage fair was held, near Pha-Long, on February 21, 1912. Photo 155, Plate 40 shows the dance of a "sen" player during the festival. Photos 156 and 157, Plate 40 show groups of young women [167] belonging to various "Meo" tribes of the region of Pha-Long who have come to the fair in question.)

595 Polygamy is authorized, although it is rare for the "Méo" to take a second wife, except when the first one remains sterile.

855 hard toil of the fields. Too thinly clad and fed almost exclusively
857 on maize, they remain exposed to the inclemencies of the seasons, all day long, and spend the night in a house open to every wind. This produces selection proceeding from the disappearance of the weak, but those who resist such a regimen are then able to withstand any sort of hardship.

/Between pages 136 and 137 of the text, the two following photographs appear: "White Meo women"; "Embroidered Meo women."--translator/

591 /137/ When young men of the family marry, if there are sufficient fields to cultivate around the family house, they bring their wife there and live under the authority of the father of the family. If this is not the case, they go and establish themselves in the midst of an area needing to be cleared, and undertake the task courageously.

548 The chastity of Meo women does not seem to be as unassail-
836 able as that of Tho women, and some of them shamelessly engage in prostitution, and do not have to leave their place in the family on this account. When on an inspection tour in Dongvan, I remember that I expressed my astonishment at hearing hands clap each time I passed through certain woods, which surrounded a pagoda near the post. But my astonishment gave place to stupefaction when I learned that the sacred wood was permanently haunted by young Meo girls who accorded their favors to all who came beneath its discreet shade.

[621 The number of houses which make up a hamlet rarely exceeds
361] three or four. Even then the inhabitants usually are of the same stock,
631 and the head of the hamlet is naturally enough the progenitor of the
615 family group. The various hamlets of a small valley or of a little rocky cirque are grouped under the authority of a ma phai, who is properly speaking the chief of the village. Several villages are grouped under the authority of a ping tau, who fills the role of a giap truong or district chief in an Annamese commune, and who is himself assisted in his duties by a tsa thao. Finally, the different districts are joined together to form a tribe under the orders of a tung cha who fills the role of the mayor of a Tho commune, with a still greater
631 authority. This is the type of organization which exists in Dong Quan
609 and surrounding country, when the tribe is of a certain extent. If
563 it is less important, it is headed only by a ping tau or a simple ma phai, who is under the authority of the mayor of the Tho commune

39: Bernatzik--43 E-5 (1936-1937) 1947 AO1 Thailand
AKha A04
Miao AE5

/30/

Chapter 5

Social Organization

a) Organization of the Family

A M 596 618 [611] Among the Meau as well as among the Akha, the family is organized strictly by father right. No esteem even similar to the consideration enjoyed by the parents is shown toward any other relative. In accordance with the organization by father right, descent is reckoned in the male line, and married women belong absolutely to the family of their husband, if he is already independent, or otherwise to the family of the father-in-law.

A M [614] M [775] The extent to which wives are absorbed in the new family group is shown by the fact that the married woman among the Meau not only loses every connection with the sib /Sippe/ from which she is descended, which is also the custom among the Akha, but also, after her death, her soul arises anew in the next child of her husband's family (cf. the chapter, "Religion and Magic," section on "Ideas about Death and the Soul").

M 596 618 [591] Adult unmarried sons always remain with their father; even married sons do not at first establish an independent family, but are regarded among the Meau as belonging, along with their wives and children, to the family of the father until they have completed their thirtieth year. Accordingly, they live in the paternal home up to this time, even though in a separate area, with their wives and children, and do not manage an independent household. Not until they have reached the aforementioned age do they have a right to build themselves a house and to establish an independent family.

M 593 618 /31/ According to Dhuraratsadorn (1), the Meau never

1. Page 167.

part from their sons, even if the latter are married. As my remarks show, this statement can be regarded as correct only

/76 cont./

A 857 [231] AM [516] Play with lizards and insects, such as beetles and butterflies, is seen much more rarely than among the Meau. In all such cases, however, the game ends with the merciless chopping up of the animal, although the children of the Akha have scarcely less manual dexterity than those of the Meau. The Akha children evidently never hit upon the idea that one could talk with the animals, much less the idea that the animals could understand them.

6. In the Family

A M 596 [591] The organization of the family is exactly the same among the Akha and Meau. The unit is the large /extended/ family /Grossfamilie/. The sons marry early and, with wife and children, live in the house of their father up to a certain time, as has already been discussed in detail (see the chapter, "Social Organization," section on "Family Units").

A M 595 Savina (1) attributes monogamy to the Meau. Undoubtedly, however,

1. II, p. 184.

however, polygamy is involved here; indeed, it is even more common among the Meau than among the Akha. Even though the poorer people live monogamously, this is the case among almost all polygamous peoples. The decisive point is simply the legally permitted form of marriage, and the fact that polygamy is permitted cannot be denied.

A M 183 842 163 M 595 596 For both peoples the ideal of life is to be blessed with as many children as possible. Thus the number of children living in each house is considerable. The Akha are even more prolific than the Meau. Among them almost every small /nuclear/ family /Kleinfamilie/ consisted of the parents and eight to twelve children. Naturally, the difference in age between the oldest and the youngest child in a house is very great. One Meau, for instance, /77/ who lived with two wives in one house, had eleven children, six of whom were already married and, with their wives and children, no longer lived

/102 cont./
184 in the bride's house. This is the last night that the young
585 woman will spend with her girl friends in her parents' home. The next day, the bride in festive garb, and, if the bridegroom belongs to a tribe different from hers, in the garb of his tribe, goes to the house of her father-in-law in the company of a large crowd of friends of both sexes. Behind her a friend carries a chest with her belongings. The procession, in all the colors of the rainbow and accompanied by the sound of instruments, sets out along the slopes while the inhabitants of the neighboring hamlets shout greetings down from the rocks which line the route.

"The ceremony takes place in the house of the young man through the introduction of the bride to her parents-in-law
[782] and through the invocation of ancestors before the altar, if this
[769] custom is practiced in the region concerned, for in several regions it is completely absent, and furthermore principally through dances, singing, and entertainments, which, depending on the means of the bridegroom, may last one or several days."

114 /103/ Abadie (1) borrows this description almost verbatim,
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1. Page 166.

but adds that the young married couple have the choice of either starting an independent household or staying in the house of the bridegroom's father. The other authors and I myself did not find that the young couple was allowed to make this decision.

184 Dhuraratsadorn (2) makes his description shorter: "The
585
[584]

2. Page 168.

father or the go-between must be the first to go forth and ask the bride's father for the hand of his daughter. All the preparations for the wedding are then made by the bride's parents. On the wedding day, the bride's father or the go-between leads